

Noxious Weed Specialist Report for O/G Forest Plan Amendment

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Existing Condition

Invasive and noxious weed infestations are estimated to cover 514,361 acres of the Forest at this time. The great majority of these infestations (490,450 acres) are what is termed class “C” weeds, which have spread beyond our capability to eradicate them. A total of 739 different infestations make up the 490,450 acres. The management goal for C class weeds is to contain spread to present size and then decrease the population, if possible. A total of 21,732 acres (416 different infestation sites) are infested by class “B” weeds, which are of limited distribution in Arizona, common in some places in the state. Management goal for B class weeds is to contain their spread, decrease population size, then eliminate them. Nearly 2,179 acres (80 different sites) are infested by class “A” weeds, which are of limited distribution in Arizona, or unrecorded in the state. They pose a serious threat. The management goal is eradication.

Many times weed infestations start along roads or other travelways, as these are sites with disturbed soil conditions where likelihood of weed propagules being introduced is increased due to human traffic of various types.

Environmental Consequences

Amendment of the Tonto National Forest Plan to allocate the same number of user days for outfitter/guide permits for hunting, riding/pack stock use, hiking, river running, OHV use, SCUBA, and tour boats, using a different allocation method, will have no effect on noxious or invasive weed infestations. Use is not increased, and no new roads or other sources of disturbance are created.

Impacts are the same as for the “No Action” alternative.

Cumulative Effects

Other past, present and future activities may potentially contribute to cumulative effects on plant communities. Almost all activities that have occurred, are occurring, or will occur could potentially impact populations of invasive weeds either by introducing seeds or portions of weeds into non-infested areas, creating conditions favorable for germination or spread, or by reducing native plants that serve to compete with weeds. The primary activities which may affect vegetation include road use and construction, vegetation management (primarily fuels reduction), range management, fire suppression (primarily fire lines and safety zones), recreation management (primarily OHV use), and land and mineral resources. Recreation can disturb soils and create conditions conducive to the introduction of invasive species. Recreationists, their vehicles and pets can act as vectors for the dispersal of weed seeds from other areas. Likewise, livestock grazing can contribute to the introduction and spread of non-indigenous plants by

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transporting seeds into uninfested sites, disturbing the soil and preferentially grazing native plants over weed species. On areas of the Forest where grazing occurs, livestock may continue to contribute to the spread of invasive species. Fire suppression may also contribute to the introduction and spread of nonnative plants by creating favorable growing conditions and through the transportation of seed sources. All the activities listed above have at least some potential to increase the spread of invasive plants.